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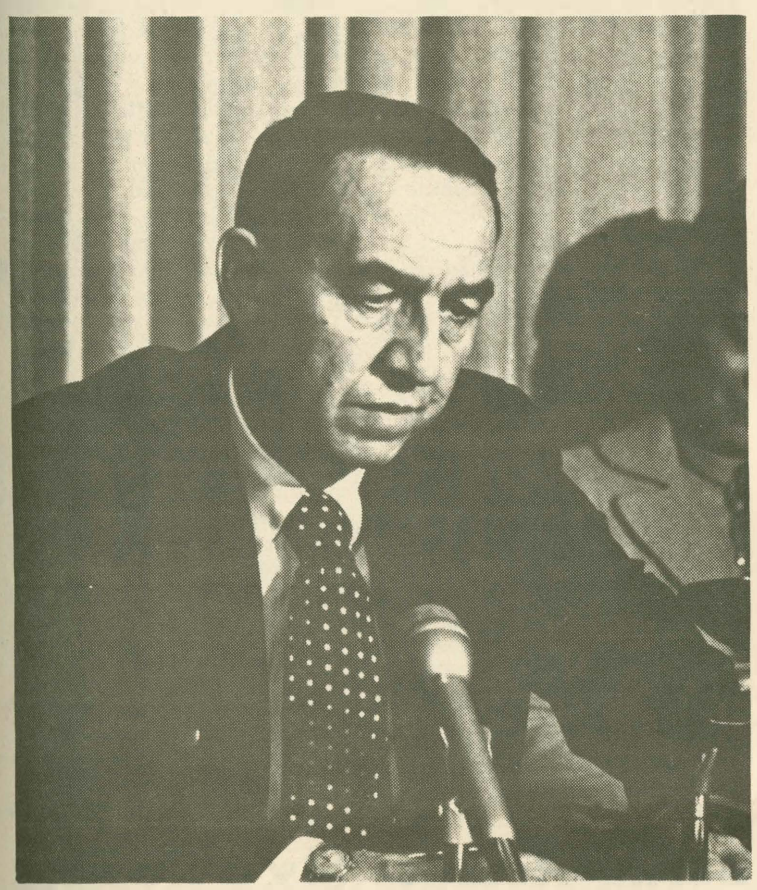
SISCO BACKS DOWN



Former President-Elect Joseph J. Sisco

Sisco Addresses Students

January 7, 1974

To the Student Body of Hamilton College:

I am addressing this letter directly to each of you fresh in the memory of December 8, the day on which I spoke briefly to the student body and shared with you my hope and aspirations for Hamilton.

After that warm, friendly and memorable reception to me and my family, I left immediately for the Middle East, our efforts culminating in the opening of the Geneva Conference. For the first time, the Middle Eastern adversaries sat face to face at the peace table. I was once again reminded how decisive the United States' role is if there is to be a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

There is today an unparalleled opportunity for progress towards peace in the area—a peace which is important to all of us as Americans who suffered the anguish of Vietnam. Upon my return from this trip Secretary Kissinger urged me to re-assess my decision to leave the Department of State so that, as the principal element of continuity, I could continue my role as the principal adviser on United States policy in the Middle East. I anguished for a number of days for it meant sacrificing a lifelong ambition to return to the academic field, and in particular in assuming the presidency of such a fine and wonderful school as Hamilton. It meant also a complete reversal of family plans for we were in the process of making the final arrangements for moving to College Hill.

Nevertheless, I decided that my duty, in the light of Middle East developments, is to remain in the public service for the indefinite future regardless of my personal feelings in the matter. I have informed the Secretary of State and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. Because my commitment to continue in the State Department to work on Middle Eastern and other matters involves a commitment of indefinite length, I am withdrawing my informal acceptance of the presidency of Hamilton tendered at the December 8 meeting of the Board. To do otherwise, in view of the indefiniteness of the future, would leave Hamilton in an anomalous position and would not, in my judgment, be in the overall interest of the College.

Finally, let me say that you paid me a high and deeply felt honor by offering the presidency to me. I will always cherish this, even though there is no way for me to reciprocate in full measure.

Joseph J. Sisco

President-Elect Withdraws To Continue Diplomatic Work

The Western White House announced today the appointment of Joseph J. Sisco as Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. Mr. Sisco has withdrawn his acceptance of Hamilton College's presidency to accept this position and remain close to the Middle East negotiations in Geneva.

Mr. Sisco decided to remain in public service in view of the developments in the Middle East, and in particular the opening of the Geneva Conference. In a letter to the Hamilton student body released today, Mr. Sisco said, "I anguished for a number of days for it meant sacrificing a lifelong ambition to return to the academic field, and in particular in assuming the presidency of such a fine and wonderful school as Hamilton. Nevertheless, I decided that my duty, in light of Middle East developments, is to remain in the public service for the indefinite future regardless of my personal feelings in the matter."

In a telephone interview yesterday, Mr. Sisco said, "I've tried to do what my conscience dictated. I spent many sleepless nights."

There is no indication what action the college will take in seeking a replacement for the resigned president-elect, but Coleman Burke, chairman of the Hamilton Board of Trustees, said that the Executive Committee of the Board will meet later this month and that the entire Board will meet in February.

Commenting on Mr. Sisco's change of heart, J. Martin Carovano, the man whose acting presidency will extend longer than expected, said, "I am disappointed and saddened. I am very sorry he is not coming. It would have been very exciting for Hamilton as an institution and I was very excited about the prospects of working with him from a personal point of view. I can understand, however, why he believed he had to reassess his decision to leave public service. I certainly wish him well."

Mr. Sisco's appointment as Hamilton's 16th president was made December 5. He visited the campus three days later to attend the winter meeting of the Board of Trustees. At a press conference on December 8, Mr. Sisco said he was leaving Washington because of a long-standing interest in higher education and a deep personal commitment to the standards and values of Hamilton.

At his December visit, he was greeted by over 500 students in the Chapel with a standing ovation. Mr. Sisco introduced his two daughters, who were to attend Kirkland College. They will now attend college near Washington, D.C.

Mr. Sisco termed his acceptance of Hamilton's presidency "informal" in his letter of withdrawal to Chairman Burke, but in light of the December announcement and visit, most observers questioned the informal nature of the acceptance. It was apparent that Mr. Sisco's acceptance was official and formal.

A reconvening of the Presidential Search Committee seems unlikely at this early date. One search committee member said that the committee's files were destroyed on Mr. Sisco's appointment and that individual members of the committee had destroyed their own files. Mr. Burke indicated that the present arrangement of sharing presidential duties between Mr. Carovano and Dean Stephen G. Kurtz would continue. "We're awfully lucky to have Mr. Carovano and Mr. Kurtz," the Board chairman said.

Joseph J. Sisco at his first. . . and last. . . Chapel address

The 'Big Fish'

Hamilton went for the "big fish;" it had him tied to the boat, but the sharks got to him before the college could bring him to shore.

Joseph Sisco made an untimely decision to continue his work in the State Department as chief Middle East advisor. We find it difficult to excuse Mr. Sisco's withdrawal from the institution to which he made a commitment. Again without a president, Hamilton has been placed in an embarassing position, and the efforts of the Presidential Search Committee have been frustrated. Joseph Sisco, who was to have done great things for Hamilton College, has damaged the institution without even having taken office.

But now is not the time to bemoan the loss of Hamilton's "big fish." The business at hand is selecting a successor to John Chandler as quickly and as fairly as possible.

A completely new search is unrealistic. There are, however, reasonable alternatives. A newly constituted Presidential Selection Committee should be formed. Rather than repeat the old committees labors, it should re-evaluate the top candidates, using the Search Committee's work, and move quickly to a new choice. The selection committee, composed of six trustees selected as the Board sees fit, three faculty members elected by the faculty, and three students elected by the student body, should operate with the advice of three non-voting members of the old Search Committee. Not only should the Selection Committee re-evaluate top candidates, but it should seriously consider men within the Hamilton community with the qualifications of men like J. Martin Carovano or Stephen Kurtz, or Trustees Sol Linowitz or Richard W. Couper.

This Selection Committee has the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of the earlier Search Committee. We can now see that perhaps the inputs of only twelve men working closely together is not sufficient for an effective search and selection process. Seeking inputs and feedback from the general college community, or at least a wider circle of community members, can only benefit a new selection committee in what promises to be a difficult task.

Considering the unfortunate turn of events, we implore the Board of Trustees to seriously judge the cloak and dagger secrecy which characterized the last attempt in finding a president. That is not the way to pick Hamilton's chief executive. Any candidate who is good enough to be considered as Hamilton's president is certainly strong enough to face the students and faculty before any decision is made.

Coleman Burke '34, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, received two letters from Assistant Secretary of State Joseph J. Sisco explaining his inability to accept the presidency of Hamilton College. Mr. Burke is now faced with the task of seeking another successor to John Chandler. The length of time in which the college community can expect a new president is, according to Mr. Burke, "in the lap of the Gods."

Sisco to Burke: I

Dear Coleman:

It is with heavy heart and deep regret that I inform you that I will not be available within the reasonable time frame planned to assume the presidency of Hamilton College.

When I rendered my informal acceptance to the Board of Trustees at its meeting on December 8 my hope and expectation was that I could be available on the campus some time in the spring of 1974. With developments as they are in the Middle East, and, in particular, the opening of the Geneva Conference this is no longer a realistic timetable. Secretary Kissinger and I have discussed this matter at length, and I have agreed in response to his desire to make a further commitment of indefinite duration to continue in the department of State. I am informing you promptly so that Hamilton College can take this into account in its plans for the future.

I shall always cherish this expression of confidence and honor paid to me by Hamilton College, its Board, Faculty, alumni and student body. I realize that my unavailability in the foreseeable future will require the making of other arrangements. I would be more concerned if Hamilton did not have in Martin Carovano and Stephen Kurtz two outstanding men of proven leadership and a strong and outstanding faculty and other dedicated supporters who can carry on the work of the College with distinction.

Hamilton has displayed great courage and an innovative spirit in being willing to repose leadership of the College in an individual outside the normal educational framework. This spirit will undoubtedly assure Hamilton's continuing preeminent position in the liberal arts college system of our country.

I wish to thank you for all the courtesies and considerations so warmly rendered both to me and my family. I would appreciate it if you would make this letter available to all concerned at Hamilton.

Joseph J. Sisco

Sisco to Burke: II

Dear Coleman:

In order to avoid any ambiguity resulting from my letter of January 3, I want to inform you and the Board of Trustees that for the reasons contained therein I am withdrawing my informal acceptance of the presidency of Hamilton tendered at the December 8 meeting.

As you know from our conversations, this is a matter of deep regret for both me and my family. However, the decision I took to remain in the State Department was the course I felt I had to take. In view of the fact that I can give no assurance as to when I might be available, I believe in the interests of Hamilton steps should be initiated promptly to select a new president.

Again, on behalf of all of us we want to thank all of you for the courteous and warm reception we received at Hamilton.

Joseph J. Sisco

Burke Accepts Sisco Decision

Dear Joe:

"It is with heavy heart and deep regret" that I acknowledge your letters of January 3 and January 7 informing us that you will not be available to assume the Presidency of Hamilton College within the time frame that we and you had planned.

Your words accurately reflect our feelings as it has become necessary for us both to conclude that it would be unfair to Hamilton and to you to continue as President-elect while undertaking an indefinite term as Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs.

In view of the circumstances in our country and in the world which impelled you to accept the post of Undersecretary, we, of course, have no alternative but to accept your withdrawal of your informal acceptance of the Presidency of Hamilton tendered at our Trustees' meeting on December 8.

I am sure the entire Hamilton community who rejoiced in your acceptance of the Presidency of Hamilton College wish you well in the Middle East negotiations in which you are now involved with Secretary Kissinger.

We have gained great respect for you and your family, for the integrity of your relationship with Hamilton these past months, and for the contribution we are confident you will be making to our country and to the peace of the world.

If Elihu Root were with us today, I am sure he would join me and my fellow Trustees in altering the famous Latin phrase to read: *Ave, sed non vale.* As you are a Latin scholar you know that this is, "Hail, but not farewell."

Coleman Burke

Comment

President of the Month

BY DOUGLAS GLUCROFT

Joseph Sisco's first official act as President of Hamilton College was to submit his resignation. No matter. One must look back fondly as one did upon the Chandler years. One must evaluate the Sisco *days*—about 35 of them in all.

First, is he still Hamilton's 16th President? What will Walter Pilkington say about him if he revises his History of the College?

Sisco's candidacy was made public by The Spectator on November 9. A campus debate then followed on the propriety of that publication. Some felt that such publicity could, conceivably, be injurious to the jobs of men like Mr. Sisco. How wrong some people can be! As a result of Mr. Sisco's threatening departure for his "first love", Henry Kissinger nominated him for a promotion.

Then, the formal announcement, a whirlwind visit, and memories, only memories.

It was a smile, a handshake, and some banter. "I plan to spend a great deal of time on campus," remarked Mr. Sisco following his December 8 press conference. He reminisced about his days as reporter and college journalist.

It was a speech to a brimming Chapel, thunderous applause, and a standing ovation. One of Mr. Sisco's daughters hugged and kissed her father as he left the Chapel, the students still applauding their new leader. Will that young woman be at Kirkland as scheduled in February, or is this a "family resignation?"

It was direct answers to direct questions. The serene Clinton atmosphere, the quiet of a Saturday morning on College Hill, was a strange background for an international diplomat and discussion of the Middle East crises.

A man wanting to finish a book, maybe teach a course. A woman looking forward to retirement after a business career in Washington, D.C. This was to be the Siscos' life here.

Did we for a moment think we could compete with Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger? After all, they were *Time* magazine's men of the year for 1972.

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